

# POMEGRANATE The biblical fruit of knowledge

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Many people are familiar with the story of Adam and Eve's fall from paradise in the book of Genesis in the Old Testament, but some scholars now believe the unnamed forbidden fruit may not have been an apple, but instead was more likely to be the red pomegranate.

Do you recognise this red/orange coloured fruit? It is the pomegranate (pom-eeh-gran-at) or as many Indian readers will know as anaar. It is one of the first cultivated fruits thought to have originated from the ancient Middle Eastern kingdom of Iran, and then travelled to northern India and throughout the Mediterranean region.

Spanish settlers introduced it to Latin America and California in 1769, and it is believed to have arrived to Fiji with the indentured Indian labourers.

## THE HOLY FRUIT

A symbol of fertility and immortality throughout the ancient world, the pomegranate's healing properties were discussed in one of the oldest medical texts, the Ebers papyrus from Egypt (circa 1500 BC).

Long before its reference in the Bible, the fruit is mentioned in both Greek and Persian mythology representing life, regeneration, and marriage.

Its hundreds of seeds inside the fruit connected it with insemination and a man's virile strength. In Judaism, pomegranates are depicted in the temple King Solomon built in Jerusalem.

Jewish tradition teaches that the pomegranate is a symbol for righteousness, because it is said to have 613 seeds that corresponds with the 613 mitzvot or commandments of the Torah. In some artistic depictions, the pomegranate is found in the hand of Mary, mother of Jesus.

The Qur'an mentions pomegranates three times twice as examples of the good things God creates, once as a fruit found in the Garden of Paradise.

## BUDDHA'S GIFT

Pomegranate is also one of the three blessed fruits in Buddhism, along with peach and citrus fruits. Why is it so worshipped and holy in Buddhism?

The story that has been handed down for many years is that Buddha was touched by a gift of a pomegranate fruit by an old poor woman, as a way of paying homage and respect to him.

From then on, the fruit was considered valuable and blessed, so the people who worship this religion

see the fruit the same way Buddha did; a symbol of holiness.

## LEGENDARY HEALTH PROPERTIES

In traditional Asian medicine, pomegranate fruits are recommended as a health tonic and as a treatment for numerous ailments including diarrhoea, dysentery, and diabetes.

Botanically, the fruit of *P. granatum* is a large berry with a leathery skin filled with hundreds of edible, red ruby-like seeds encased by a juicy pulp. The pomegranate's irresistible appeal and legendary medicinal properties have been the subject of myths, epics and works of art of the old world.

Pomegranate juice has been scientifically shown to help the body, as it is rich in antioxidants, the molecules that protect the body from heart disease, premature aging, Alzheimer's disease, and cancer.

Amazingly pressed pomegranate juice has three times higher antioxidant properties than green tea and red wine.

The health benefits of pomegranate have been attributed generally to the high levels and wide diversity of phytochemicals, the healing medicines that come from the plant kingdom.

## MEDICINE FROM OUR PAST

Since the early days of the written word, the promise of the pomegranate has made a lasting impression as a sensual symbol and a medicine of life, appearing in poetic works of great authors from Homer to Shakespeare.

In Fiji it is rarely found at the markets, as most people do not understand its importance as a medicine food, with the exception of founder Sashi Kiran from FRIEND Fiji in Tuvu. The FRIEND rural initiative has been developing its network of organically certified farmers to grow a range of unique produce like wild mint and sage, but also planting pomegranate trees.

Sashi's knowledge of anaar most probably comes from the ancient Ayurvedic principles of medicine foods and encouraging farmers to cultivate this fruit will provide the local chefs with an in-demand fruit for tourism, and another weapon in the fight against non communicable diseases.

When you eat the pomegranate fruit, you'll be giving your body powerful antioxidants, nutrients, and vitamins, so some people might say you're blessing your body with what it needs to fight potential health problems.

Along with figs, dates and citrus fruits, pomegranate is one of the most widely talked about fruits in humankind's history. It's importance as a medicine and holy food transcends religion, history and race.

Today, it has seen a revitalized comeback and can be found in top restaurants for breakfast, salads and main course dishes. Although widely unknown in Fiji, the discovery of this holiest of fruits in our

backyard should inspire us all to eat, drink and slurp more of the pomegranate.

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